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THE IGNIS FATUUS, ITS CHARACTER AND
LEGENDARY ORIGIN.

A TALE OF MARYLAND NEGROES AND ITS COMPARATIVE HISTORY.

THE legend below printed was obtained by Miss Mary Willis Minor of Baltimore, from the recitation of a negro servant, and forms part of the collections of the Baltimore Folk-Lore Society, to be hereafter published as the Ninth Memoir of the American Folk-Lore Society.¹

JACK-O'-MY-LANTERN.

Once dey wuz a man name Jack. He wuz a mighty weeked man, an' treat he wife an' chil'en like a dawg. He did n' do nuttin' but drink from mawin' tell night, an' 'twarn' no use to say nuttin' 'tall to 'im 'cause he wuz jes' ez ambitious ez a mad dawg. Well suh, he drink an' he drink tell whiskey could n' mek 'im drunk ; but et las' hit bu'n 'im up inside ; an' den de Debbble come fur 'im. When Jack see de Debbble, he wuz so skeart he leettle mo'n er drapt in de flo'. Den he bague de Debbble to let 'im off jes' a leettle while, but de Debbble say, —

“Naw Jack, I ain' gwine wait no longer ; my wife, Abbie Sheens, is speekin' yo'.”

So de Debbble start off pretty bris' an' Jack wuz 'bleeged to foller, tell dey come to a grog shop.

“Mr. Debbble,” said Jack, “don' yo' wan' a drink ?”

“Well,” said de Debbble, “I b'leeve I does, but I ain' got no small change ; we don' keep no change down dyah.”

“Tell yo' wotcher do, Mr. Debbble,” said Jack. “I got one ten cent en my pocket ; yo' change yo'sef inter nurr ten cent, an' we kin git two drinks, an' den yo' kin change yo'sef back agin.”

So de Debbble change hisse'f inter a ten cent, an' Jack pick 'im up ; but stid o' gwine in de grog shop, Jack clap de ten cent in he pocket-book dat he had n't took outen he pocket befo', 'cause he did n' wan' de Debbble to see dat de ketch wuz in de shape ob a cross. He shet it tight, an' dyah he had de Debbble, an' 'twarn' no use fur 'im to struggle, 'cause he could n' git by dat cross. Well suh ; fus' he swar and threat'n Jack wid what he wuz gwine do to 'im, an' den he begun to bague, but Jack jes' tu'n roun' an' start to go home. Den de Debbble say, —

“Jack, ef yo'll lemme out o' hyah, I'll let yo' off fur a whole year, I will, fur trufe. Lemme go Jack, 'cause Abbie Sheens is too lazy

¹ In regard to the dialect, I give the spelling as communicated by Miss Anne W. Whitney, Secretary of the Baltimore Society.

to put de bresh on de fire, an' hit 'll all go black out ef I ain' dyah fo' long, to ten' to it."

Den Jack say ter hisse'f, "I gret mine to let 'im go, 'cause in a whole year I kin 'pent and git 'ligion an' git shet on 'im dat er way."

Den he say, "Mr. Debble, I 'll letcher out ef yo' 'clar fo' gracious yo' won' come after me fur twel munt."

Den de Debble promise befo' Jack undo de clasp, an' by de time Jack got he pocket-book open he wuz gone. Den Jack say to hisse'f, "Well, now I gwine to 'pent an' git 'ligion sho'; but 't ain' no use bein' in no hurry; de las' six munt will be plenty o' time. Whar dat ten cent? Hyah 't is. I gwine git me a drink." When de six munt wuz gone, Jack 'lowed one munt would be time 'nuff to 'pent, and when de las' munt come, Jack say he gwine hab one mo' spree, an' den he would have a week er ten days lef' an' dat wuz plenty o' time, 'cause he done hearn o' folks 'penting on dey death bade. Den he went on a spree fo' sho', an' when de las' week come, Jack had 'lirium trimblins, an' de fus' ting he knowed dyah wuz de Debble at de do', an' Jack had to git outen he bade and go 'long wid 'im. After a while dey pas a tree full o' gret big red apples.

"Don' yo' wan' some apples, Mr. Debble?" said Jack.

"Yo' kin git some ef yo' wan' em," said de Debble, an' he stop an' look up in de tree.

"How yo' speck a man wid 'lirium trimblins to climb a tree?" said Jack. "Yo' cotch hole de bough, an' I 'll push yer up in de crotch, an' den yo' kin git all yo' wants."

So Jack push 'im in de crotch, an' de Debble 'gin to feel de apples to git a meller one. While he wuz doin' dat, Jack whip he knife outen he pocket, an' cut a cross in de bark ob de tree, jes' under de Debble, an' de Debble holler, —

"Tzip! Sumpi' nurr hut me den. Wotcher doin' down dyah, Jack? I gwine cut yo' heart out."

But he could n' git down while dat cross wuz dyah, an' Jack jes' sot down on de grars, an' watch 'im ragin' an' swarin' an' cussin'. Jack kep' 'im dyah all night tell 'twuz gret big day, an' den de Debble change he chune, an' he say, —

"Jack, lemme git down hyah an' I 'll gib yo' nurr year."

"Gimme nuttin'!" said Jack, an' stretch hisse'f out on de grars. Arfter a while, 'bout sun up, de Debble say, —

"Jack, cut dis ting offen hyah an' lemme git down, an' I 'll gib yo' ten year."

"Naw surree," said Jack, "I won' letcher git down less yo' 'clar fo' gracious dat yo' won' nuver come arfter me no mo'."

When de Debble fine Jack wuz hard ez a rock, he 'greed, an'

'clared fo' gracious dat he wouldn' nuver come fur Jack agin, an' Jack cut de cross offen de tree, and de Debbble lef' widout a word. Arfter dat Jack nuver thought no mo' 'bout 'pentin', 'cause he warn' feared ob de Debbble, an' he did n' wan' to go whar dey warn' no whiskey. Den he lib on tell he body war out, an' he wuz' bleegee to die. Fus' he went to de gate o' heaven, but de angel jes' shake he hade. Den he wen' to de gate o' hell, but when wud come dat Jack wuz dyah, de Debbble holler to de imps.

"Shet de do' an' don' let dat man come in hyah; he done treat me scanlous. Tell 'im to go 'long back whar he come frum."

Den Jack say, —

"How I gwine fine my way back in de dark? Gimme a lantern."

Den de Debbble tek a chunk outen de fire, an' say, —

"Hyah, tek dis, and dontcher nuver come back hyah no mo'."

Den Jack tek de chunk o' fire an' start back, but when he come to a ma'sh, he done got los', an' he ain' nuver fine he way out sence.

This negro legend is of European origin; before citing parallels, it will be necessary to consider the nature of the phenomenon which goes by the name of *ignis fatuus*.

More than one writer has observed the manner in which American negroes have appropriated the superstition. Speaking of Jack-o'-the-Lantern, W. Wirt Sikes observes: "The negroes of the southern seaboard states of America invest the goblin with an exaggeration of the horrible peculiarly their own. They call it Jack-muh-lantern, and describe it as a hideous creature five feet in height, with goggle-eyes and huge mouth, its body covered with long hair, which goes leaping and bounding through the air like a gigantic grasshopper. This frightful apparition is stronger than any man and swifter than any horse, and compels its victims to follow it into the swamp, where it leaves them to die."¹ Mary A. Owen mentions similar beliefs as prevalent among aged negresses in Missouri, who relate extravagant tales respecting "Jacky-mi-Lantuhns" or "Wuller-Wups." There is, she explains, both a "man-jacky" and a "woman-jacky;" persons unfaithful in the marriage relation are tied by the devil in bladders and flung into the swamp, where they endeavor to drown the victims who by magical influence are compelled to follow their steps. Such spirits often issue from churchyards, and the notion is mingled with superstitious ideas answering to those concerning vampires. They are as tall as cottonwood trees.²

The negro conceptions are not so peculiar as has been asserted,

¹ *British Goblins*, London, 1880, p. 18.

² *Voodoo Tales*, New York, 1893, c. xviii.

but on the contrary do not essentially differ from ideas current in Europe, whence they have doubtless been derived.¹

Even with persons scientifically inclined, the *ignis fatuus* still passes for an external reality. Thus the Century Dictionary defines the word: "A meteoric light that sometimes appears in summer and autumn nights, and flies in the air a little above the surface of the earth, chiefly in marshy places near stagnant waters, and in churchyards. It is generally supposed to be produced by the spontaneous combustion of small jets of gas (carburetted or phosphuretted hydrogen) generated by the decomposition of vegetable or animal matter. . . . Before the introduction of the general drainage of swamp-lands, the *ignis fatuus* was an ordinary phenomenon in the marshy districts of England." Murray's Dictionary uses corresponding language, and adds: "It seems to have been formerly a common phenomenon, but is now extremely rare. When approached, the *ignis fatuus* appears to recede, and finally to vanish, sometimes reappearing in another direction. This led to the notion that it was the work of a mischievous sprite." The most recent encyclopædist of meteorology remarks: "Many have expressed doubts concerning the actuality of the phenomenon, yet the accounts of its appearance are so well attested that its reality must be conceded." He gives a number of mentions, beginning with an elaborate account of 1807, but rejects chemical explanations, assuming spontaneous combustion of illuminating gases as out of line with correct theory.² On the other hand, many observers, after taking all possible pains, have failed to satisfy themselves in regard to the existence of the gleams. I am not aware that phenomena of the sort have attracted attention in the United States; at least, in a marshy district where I spend much of my time I have not heard of any comment on similar displays.

The truth seems to be, that the credit given to the *ignis fatuus* is in great measure owing to the imposing Latin title which gives it an

¹ In Switzerland the eyes of an *irrlicht* are compared to fiery bushel-baskets. E. L. Rochholz, *Schweitzersagen aus der Aargau*, 1856, ii. 84. Their size is variable, from dwarfish to gigantic; they may be as tall as forest trees. F. Schönwerth, *Aus der Oberpfalz*, Augsburg, 1858, ii. 90. Untrue women walk after death; if an adulterous man meet them, he must dance with them until he sinks exhausted. A. Wuttke, *Deutsche Volksaberglaube*, 2d ed., Berlin, 1869, p. 445. The motion of *ignes fatui* by leaps and bounds is everywhere usual.

² S. A. Arrhenius, *Lehrbuch der kosmischen Physik*, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 879-80. Arrhenius does not mention the observations of J. Allies, who succeeded in finding the *ignes fatui*, which he describes as rising several feet and falling to earth, as moving horizontally like the flights of the green woodpecker, being bluer than a candle, and some as large as Sirius. *On the Ignis-Fatuus, or Will-o'-the-wisp, and the Fairies*, London, 1839.

air of verisimilitude. Whatever illuminations may occasionally be perceived, and whether these be electrical or chemical, those accredited by folk-lore are not referable to actual occurrences, but are either purely imaginary, or else fanciful interpretations of every-day happenings.

This proposition becomes clear, when the belief is taken in connection with kindred opinions in which similar lights play a part. These are divisible into several categories. First may be mentioned the so-called "corpse-candles," supposed to precede and prognosticate a death. If luminous appearances of the sort issue from the room of a sick person, and are seen to enter the churchyard, it is taken for granted that the illness will be fatal, and that the sufferer will shortly be borne to his rest along the path followed by the apparition. The movement of the flame answers to that which may be expected from the living man; if the pace be brisk, as that of a youth skipping or running, the death of a child is indicated; if slow and even, of an elderly person. In this case the vision is, so to speak, a present reflection of the future event; inasmuch as it formerly was usual to inter by night, and in consequence torches or candles were borne by the mourners, such lamps belong to the funeral procession, which appears in an anticipatory reflex. So another sort of flames, those indicating the presence of buried treasure, may represent the flickering of the funeral pyres anciently employed in cremation; the dead was laid in the barrow with his goods about him, whence a bold hand might win riches. Lights, again, may be expected in any meeting with ghosts, since the astral body of a spirit is in itself luminous.¹

According to early religious conceptions, the cultivated land, the farm and croft, belongs to mankind and to the deities whose homes have therein been established; beyond this territory lies the wilderness, where dwell spirits who in the desert pursue a life similar to that of humanity, live by the produce of the forest, and have to wild animals a relation answering to that which man bears to the flocks and herds. Mountain and bog are supposed to abound in spiritual neighbors, often hostile and always capricious, who live like men in communities and families, have proper names, individual form, character, and function, yet remain unknown, save in so far as accident brings some particular being into contact with the villagers. Mysterious gleams perceived in untilled ground are interpreted as evidencing the presence of such strangers, who may be of any age and either sex, will be engaged in tasks and enterprises answering to

¹ For the subject of ghostly lights, see several papers in recent volumes of *Folk-Lore* (London); M. J. Walhouse, vol. v. (1894), pp. 293-99; H. F. Feilberg, vi. (1895), 288-300; R. C. Maclagan, "Ghost Lights of the West Highlands," viii. (1897), 203-56.

those which would employ the perceiver, will be taken for friendly or malevolent as the impression dictates, and in general take toward the farmer and his community about the same attitude as the latter have to the distrusted inhabitants of the adjoining village. The presence of such neighbors will be indicated by the same signs which ordinarily mark the approach of human wanderers; the spirits will need and use lights for all tasks in which lights are needed, while the nature of the lamp will answer to that which is common in the locality, torch, rush-candle, or lantern; the bearer will naturally often be accompanied by others of his supernatural kind, with whom he will engage in games, revels, and industries; if busy with toils of agriculture, he may be desirous of profiting by human experience, and after the general habit of tillers of the soil borrow the tools he requires. In this manner arise innumerable variations of appearance and possibilities of conception, in different localities associated with different presentations of such imagined existences.

As for the external cause which supplies the perception, this is a matter of secondary consequence. The flash of a firefly, or a watery reflection of a star, the sunset-gleam returned from a window, moon-light in the forest, the flight of a luminous insect, or simply the reaction of the eyeball against extreme darkness, will be all-sufficient to create elaborate and circumstantial visions, of which the intellectual element is projected from the fancy. Imagination creates experience; during the period of its existence a superstitious belief never lacks the support of ocular testimony, and is never discredited by failure to observe a corresponding reality. The *ignis fatuus* is one aspect of a universal faith; that it alone has continued to pose as a separate entity is an example of the way in which a high-sounding title promotes recognition.

For these lights, names are numerous. *Ignis fatuus* is universal in European literature, but has the appearance of a relatively modern and rationalistic designation. English testimonies are from the sixteenth century; the word is explained as meaning "foolish" or "false" fire. The term "fool's fire" is also English. Corresponding, but in what manner is not perfectly clear, is the French *feu follet*. Another Latin title is *ignis erraticus*, to which answer the English "wandering fire," "walking fire," German *irrlucht*.¹

¹ For the English words, see testimonies in Murray, *New English Dictionary*, and the *Stanford Dictionary*. Italian uses especially the plural, *fuochi fatui*. The Old French *folet* signifies elf, fairy; *feu follet*, therefore, ought to mean fairy fire, corresponding to English elf-fire (seventeenth century), Welsh *ellyldân* (E. Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*, Oswestry, 1887-96, p. 112), Gaelic *teine sìth* (J. G. Campbell, *Witchcraft and Second-Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1902, p. 171). *Feu follet*, therefore, may be the original from which, by mistranslation, has come *ignis fatuus*. *Folet* I take to be from *fol*,

For the ghostly fire English literature has accepted two proper names, Jack-of-the-lantern (Jack-a-lantern, lantern-Jack, etc.) and Will-o'-the-wisp (Will-a-wisp, Will-in-a-wisp, etc.). But to the light belongs many other personal names: Jenny-with-the-lantern, Peg-a-lantern, Hob-with-a-lantern (Hoberdy's lantern, etc.), Kit-with-the-canstick, Kitty-candlestick, Joan-in-the-wad, Jacket-a-wad, Gillion-a-burnt-tail. We perceive that the sprite might have any common Christian name, out of which two have found literary reception, and, as usual, superseded and extinguished less favored appellations.¹

The *ignis fatuus* may also be named from locality, as in the English example of "Syleham lights." Such title implies a story, the nature of which may be conjectured from an Irish instance. In Scottish islands the phenomenon has been called "Uist Light" (*Solus Uithist*), a name derived from a legend variously told. A girl from Benbecula is said, by misconduct, to have brought on her head the maternal curse. She disappeared (being probably drowned), and her spirit becomes a "great fire" (*teine mhor*).²

The idea underlying these personal and local appellations is that wandering flames belong to the souls of persons well known and recently deceased, of whom can be related histories explanatory of the reason which caused them to undergo such transformation.³ Among an infinite number of such tales, certain ones, because of their intrinsic interest, attained a circulation beyond the limits of the neighborhood, and became widely famous, as is the case with the particular narrative of which we have an American version from the lips of a Maryland negro. It should be added that such legends are generally not of local invention, but far-wandered beliefs which here and there strike independent root, develop into a new species, and in their turn travel and vary.

The extent to which the fiery apparitions vary in aspect is indicated by the English names. In the cases of Jack and Will, we have only spectral men who carry lanterns or torches, as sensible

causatively, as a being that befools (by spiritual possession); *feu follet* may have once carried such connotation, a befooling fire.

¹ For names of the *ignis fatuus*, see the learned paper of G. L. Kittredge, "The Friar's Lantern and Friar Rush," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, xv. (1900), 415-41. Kittredge shows that Rush had nothing to do with the lantern-bearing friar of Milton's *L'Allegro*. Also, C. P. G. Scott, "The Devil and his Imps," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, xxvi. (1895), 79-146.

² Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 171; Maclagan, *op. cit.*, p. 227; J. MacRury, in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, xix. (1893), 158-171; *Folk-Lore*, xiii. (1902), 43.

³ Thus in Aarau, Switzerland, the illumination was thought to be the soul of a miller deceased twenty years before. Rochholz, *op. cit.*, ii. 84.

people do on dark nights. In all countries nocturnal gleams are similarly interpreted.¹ But the glow may proceed from the person of the wanderer, in a number of different ways.² Gill-of-the-burnt-tail evidently draws the flaming streak behind her.³ As for Joan-in-the-wad, the flaming bundle of cloth envelops her person, so that she must appear as a pyramid of fire; just so *revenants* who come from Hell or Purgatory are dressed in blazing garments.

Being ghosts, the night-roamers are likely to be closely connected with their mortal remains; if the Will-o'-the-wisp be seized, only a bone is left in the grasp.⁴ A particularly weird manner of conception is that the skeleton should walk with a light in the breast, so that the ribs are darkly silhouetted on the radiance, and are therefore compared to baskets containing a lamp.⁵ In Ireland, such a skeleton is thought of as winged, and wings are elsewhere assigned to an *ignis fatuus*.⁶ In general, it may be said that the local element of the descriptions is relatively limited; West European ideas so closely coincide that an observation in Norway, Germany, the Low Countries, France, Brittany, or England will probably have had parallels in the other lands, and after dialectic variation and divergence of name is allowed for, observations from one region may be cited as likely to hold in all. If English folk-lore does not furnish examples of all the different ways of imaging the lustres, such deficiency is to be set down to poverty of record much more than to any original difference; in this respect, as in others, West European folk-lore forms a body of popular knowledge which is nearly uniform.

Since *ignes fatui* are only illuminated spirits, and every spiritual

¹ Among examples of ecclesiastics who carry a "friar's lantern" may be added that of the *éclaireur* in Upper Brittany, who is always looking for the sacramental wafer which he has dropped in water. Such illuminators may be asked to give light, with a formula:

*Eclaire-moi, Poirard ;
J'vas t'donner deux liards.*

P. Sébillot, *Traditions et superstitions de la Haute-Bretagne*, Paris, 1882, i. 150.

² The evil spirit appears as a horse with fiery tail. *Folk-Lore*, x. (1899), 362. Perhaps Gill may have had an equine form.

³ Fiery men show themselves as all fire, spitting fire, or bearing fire on the back, as a burning parcel of straw or fiery column, drawing a streak of flame, or as a fiery skeleton, with head under arm. Rochholz, *op. cit.*, p. 446.

⁴ A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz, *Norddeutsche Sagen*, etc., No. 260.

⁵ So regularly in Swiss belief, Rochholz, *loc. cit.*; like Irish representation, MacLagan, 229; the fire is in the heart of the girl; the same comparison to a basket.

⁶ For the lights as winged, Irish, MacLagan, *loc. cit.*, Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 171. In Flanders, *les lumerottes* are souls of infants who die unbaptized, and appear as a bird which bears in its beak a diamond whence proceeds the light. J. Lemoine, *Le folk-lore Wallon*, Ghent, 1892, p. 131. The idea rests on the general representation of such souls as birds. A. Le Braz, *La légende de la mort en Basse-Bretagne*, Paris, 1883, p. 270; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 829, 916.

being may at one time or another be lustrous, it is only natural that many classes of supernatural beings should be represented among the nocturnal light-givers whom the Latin name *ignis fatuus* has grouped in one family.

Flaming wanderers may be gods or saints, as with Maria *stella maris* and Saint Elmo, to whom the British mariner formerly attributed the "composant" ("corpus sant," *corpo santo*) whose shining was regarded as protective.¹

Or, on the other hand, the incandescence may be considered as demonic, proceeding from the devil,² or from goblins,³ or diabolic animals.⁴

¹ These fires, as is known, were by Hellenic antiquity attributed to the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux, and their sister Helena; the name of the latter survives in Saint Elmo, Herme, etc.; in Brittany still Saint Helena. See P. Sébillot, *Légendes, croyances et superstitions de la mer*, Paris, 1886, ii. pp. 87 ff.; F. S. Bassett, *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea and of Sailors*, Chicago, 1885, pp. 302-320. These lustrous have, I believe, always been considered as interpretations of a particular electric marine phenomenon; but this doctrine will not hold; application to such supposed illuminations is at the most only secondary; the fires of St. Elmo are not to be distinguished from the *ignis fatuus*, of which they form a single species. According to Pliny, the starry lights manifested themselves also on the heads of favored individuals; a relic of such superstition survives in the Italian *fuochi fatui lambenti*. (Dictionary of Tommaseo and Bellini.) Sébillot observes that in Treguier the *feux follets* of marshes are subject to identical superstitions, p. 107. That a spirit of the marsh may be active also at sea is shown in the case of the Irish "Bog-sprite" or "Water-skeerie," an *ignis fatuus* who is thought to wave a wisp of lighted straw. Some think him a disembodied spirit and guardian of hidden treasures. He exhibits all the transitions common to such spirits, flies, stands still, becomes extinct, revives, is seen in churchyards, but also by mariners on the masts, spars, or sails. "Lageniensis" (J. O'Hanlon), *Irish Folk-Lore*, Glasgow, 1870, p. 170. The recorder adds that a single apparition is considered to betoken danger, two or more safety. The same belief is mentioned by Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* ii. 37 (see Brand, *Antiquities*, iii. 349). A Sicilian legend explains the fire of St. Elmo as the shining of a lantern given by Christ through St. Christopher. G. Pitre, *Usi e costumi del popolo Siciliano*, Palermo, 1889, iii. 66. In Cornwall "Jack Harry's lights" appear on a phantom vessel resembling that of which the loss is indicated (instead of on the ship of the navigators). M. A. Courtney, *Cornish Feasts and Folk-Lore*, Penzance, 1890, p. 134. Again, on the same coast, a wreck is foreshown by the appearance at sea of a lady who carries a lantern, and who is supposed to be in search of her drowned child. Courtney, p. 135. In Italian and Spanish, Santelmo, according to the dictionaries, is used as a name of the *ignis fatuus*, appearing on trees as well as on the water. It will be seen that the maritime lights cannot be taken by themselves, but are only a modification of the terrestrial superstition.

² A Hessian legend explains the *irrwisch* as the body of a dead usurer, whom the devil flays, stuffs with straw, and makes fly as a burning wisp. Wolf's *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Mythologie*, i. (1853), 246.

³ Light proceeds from pixies with shining heads on fire, like the rising moon. *Folk-Lore*, xi. 1900, 214.

⁴ The light is ascribed to wehrwolves, fire-drakes, etc. Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

However, the light-bearers with whom I am especially concerned, and who play the more extensive part in European record, are neither celestial nor devilish, but those spirits of the departed which, according to universal European popular belief, are denied entrance equally to heaven and the inferno, and compelled to perform their penance by long wanderings on earth. For such destiny the reasons might be either ethical or ritual.

If the soul of the deceased had in life committed any wrong which might be undone, or undertaken any vow possible to carry out, it would probably be unable to repose until atonement had been made. A crime of this sort, from Babylonian antiquity especially abhorred, was the removal of the boundary stones which determined the ownership of land. A Swiss legend relates that a youth, who at nightfall happens to pass by the edge of a wood, sees a "burning man" in whom he recognizes his godfather Gotti. On the morrow with pick and shovel he resorts to the spot, and, aided by the ghost, is able to restore the stone to its original site; the fiery soul obtains peace and is seen no more, while the lad, who has been promised Paradise as his guerdon, shortly expires.¹ Again, the person who has hidden away a treasure must roam until he can find means of restoring it to his heirs.²

For ritual reasons, the *revenants* who shine at night are those who have not received the offices of the church, have been cast out uninterred, been drowned or otherwise irregularly disposed of. A touching belief sees among such the souls of children who have died unbaptized; these are not hopelessly exiled, but under certain circumstances may attain salvation. If buried under the eaves of the church (according to German ideas), the rain which falls during the christening of a living infant will serve for their water of baptism. These spirits have such object always in mind, and particularly approach their parents in order to sue for their aid. So in the case of older persons who are buried out of holy ground, and therefore have become "burning men," the carrying of the cross which marks their burial-place into "God's acre" will be enough to deliver the sufferer. If English folk-lore does not exhibit similar features, the absence, I suppose, is owing solely to the impression on popular fancy produced by the Protestant reformation; mediæval notions were the same in England as in France and Germany.³

¹ Rochholz, *op. cit.*, ii. 78; F. Chapiseau, *Le folk-lore de la Beauce et du Perche*, Paris, 1902, ii. 244. Une âme en peine ou les bornes déplacées.

² Rochholz, p. 78. In Brittany souls of rich men who have made bad gains, thieves, etc., must wander until restoration is made. Le Braz, *op. cit.*, p. 388.

³ As testimonies, I may refer to the citations made by Brand, *Antiquities*, edition of W. C. Hazlitt, 1870, iii. 348, from works published in 1704 and 1723, to the effect that the people believed *ignes fatui* to be souls in a flame, come from purgatory, to move others to pray for their entire deliverance.

The usual fluctuation in folk-thought appears in the manner of conceiving the activity of similar beings. Their malice or good-nature would of course depend on the character of the particular man who had become a fiery ghost.

Ignes fatui share with other spirits the habit that they are influenced by sacrifices, and demand in return for their service some present, though it may be a very small one, as a small coin, or even a crumb. For the purpose of imploring their aid are used formulas, much the same in all countries of Western Europe; an English example is:—

Jack of the lantern, Joan of the lub,
Light me home, and I 'll give you a crub (crumb).¹

After the service has been rendered, the proper expression is: "Thank 'ee, Jack." Here the German has better preserved the original intention; the person assisted should say "*Gelts Gott*,"² on which the soul undergoing purgation is likely to be released, the idea being that merit and earning the gratitude of men shortens the term of penance.

On the other hand, there is a class of malicious ghosts, of whom salvation can hardly be predicated, and who take an evil pleasure in misleading night-wanderers; and it is this character which has prevailed in literature, and is reflected in the history of Jack or Will. Experience showed that those who followed the lanterns of the sprites and were lost in the bog were likely to be persons fond of the bowl; as like seeks like, this led to the conclusion that the ghost was that of a drunken person; thus Will-o'-the-wisp is said to have a face like a brandy-bottle;³ and this is the character given the spirit in the legend now in question.

After this brief exposition, necessary in order to render the matter intelligible, I proceed to trace the comparative history of the Maryland narrative.

Of the legend in England, I have met only with an abbreviated version, credited to Shropshire.

"There came to a blacksmith's shop late one night a traveller, whose horse had cast a shoe, and he wanted the blacksmith to put it on for him. So Will (that was the man's name) was very ready, and he soon had it on again all right. Now the traveller was no other

¹ In Devon, *Folk-Lore*, xi. (1900), 212. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 1801; Schönwerth, ii. 100. For French formula, see above.

² Schönwerth, ii. 94.

³ *Folk-Lore*, xi. 214. In Brittany, *Paotik he shod tan* (Boy with the lighted torch) flies like a butterfly over prairies and marshes, misleading and even drowning drunken folk, or rash persons who pursue him. F. M. Luzel, *Veillées bretonnes*, Morlaix, 1879, p. 64.

than the Apostle St. Peter himself, going about to preach the Gospel; but before he went away, he told the smith to wish a wish, whatever he chose, and it should be granted him. 'I wish,' says Will, 'that I might live my life over again.' So it was granted him, and he lived his life over again, and spent it in drinking and gambling, and all manner of wild pranks. At last his time came, and he was forced to set out for the other world, thinking of course that he would find a place in hell made ready for him; but when he came to the gates, the Devil would not let him in. No, he said, by this time Will had learnt so much wickedness he would be more than a match for him, and he dared not let him in. So away went the smith to heaven, to see if St. Peter, who had been a good friend to him before, would find him a place there; but St. Peter would not, it was n't very likely he would! and Will was forced to go back to the Old Lad again, and beg and pray for a place in hell. But the Devil would not be persuaded even then. Will had spent two lifetimes in learning wickedness, and now he knew too much to be welcome anywhere. All that the Devil would do for him, was to give him a lighted coal from hell-fire to keep himself warm, and that is how he comes to be called Will-o'-the-wisp. So he goes wandering up and down the moors and mosses with his light, wherever he can find a bit of boggy ground that he can 'tice folks to lose their way in the bog and bring them to a bad end, for he is not a bit less wicked and deceitful now than he was when a blacksmith."¹

The Shropshire narrative shows the essential feature, lost in the American version, according to which the three wishes are conferred by Christ, in exchange for hospitality offered to the Lord and his Apostles, in the course of their earthly wanderings.

I think it likely that the remnant of another English version is to be found in an Irish story attributed to Carleton, regarding one Billy Dawson, who is regarded as a notorious and an incorrigible scamp who lived a riotous and drunken life. This caused his nose to become very inflammable, and when an arch-enemy seized it with red-hot tongs, a flame at once burst forth. This continued to burn on, winter and summer; while a bushy beard which he wore helped to feed the fuel. Hence, the northern country people say that Billy Dawson has been christened Will of the Wisp, and that he plunges into the coldest quagmires and pools of water to quench the flames emitted from his burning nose. It is a remnant of his mischievous disposition, however, to lead unthinking and tipsy night-travellers into bogs, where they are likely to be drowned.²

¹ C. S. Burne, *Shropshire Folk-Lore*, London, 1883, pp. 34-5. Taken from the *Shrewsbury Journal*, 1877.

² "Lageniensis," *op. cit.*, p. 170. I have in vain sought for the passage in the works of William Carleton to which I have access.

The tale has obtained currency in Gaelic speech, being localized in the Hebrides. A poor smith, who has vainly striven to support his family, is reduced to such despair that he professes himself willing to accept help from God or the Devil. A little old man, with feet like pig's hoofs, calls at the smithy, and promises aid, on condition that the smith shall be ready to go with him at the end of a year; meanwhile he shall always find gold in his right pocket, and silver in his left. During the interval another man calls, is hospitably entertained, and as a reward grants the smith three wishes. The latter desires that any one who helps him at the forge must remain during his pleasure, that whoever sits on his chair shall not remove until given leave, and that any piece of money in his pocket must remain there until he takes it out. The stranger says the desires shall be granted, but it is a pity the wisher had not asked mercy for his soul. At the end of the year Satan appears; the smith induces him to work at the forge, where the demon remains fixed, and is obliged to grant another year; on a second visit the fiend is made to sit in the chair, with a like result; on a third visit, Satan is challenged to prove his power by turning himself into a sixpence which the smith pockets; the coin is restless, and the smith has it hammered at the forge, till the purse is reduced to dust, and the devil goes up the chimney in sparks of fire. The hero of the tale is now free, but, though no longer pestered, goes down in the world, and at death is cast out unburied; knowing that it would be useless to apply at the gate of heaven, his soul takes the road to hell, but the Devil refuses admittance: "There is not," said he, "your like within the bounds of my kingdom; I light a fire never to be quenched in your bosom. And I order thee to return to the earth, and wander up and down until the day of judgment. Thou shalt have rest neither day nor night. Thou shalt wander on earth among every place that is wetter, lower, lonelier, and more dismal than another. And thou shalt be a disgust to thyself, and a harm to every living creature thou seest."

From the smith, whose name is Sionnach (Fox), the "great fire" is called *teine Sionnachain*.¹

That the history has been current in Wales is shown by a distorted version. Sion Dafydd (John David) of the Bwlch of Ddauafen in the Arvon hills has converse with demons, quarrels with them and beats two devils in a bag which flies to pieces; the fiends take refuge in the village of Rhiwgylfylchi, which from that time has an evil repute. In return for present riches, he sells himself, with the condition that he may escape provided that he has the power to adhere to anything; when the demon comes after him, he asks leave

¹ Maclagan, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

to get into his apple-tree, and hangs on in despite of all efforts to pull him away. After death he is changed into a *Fac-y-lantern*.¹

No doubt other Welsh versions could have been found which would have precisely answered to the English.

With numerous variations, the tale is everywhere current in Europe.²

A Norwegian version recites that a smith makes a bargain with the Devil, in which he agrees to belong to the fiend at the end of seven years, provided that in the interval he may be the most skilful of his craft. In the course of wanderings, Christ and St. Peter enter the forge; as a recompense for his free service, the smith is granted three wishes. Neglecting intimations that he ought to request eternal peace, the smith, who has been troubled by thieves, desires that whoever climbs his pear-tree may be unable to descend without permission, that whoever sits in his chair must remain, and that aught which enters his steel purse must stay there. The Devil is caught, and obliged to grant successive respites. The details are related with much humor, and application of old proverbs. The Devil is induced to enter the purse in order to examine its links, and reports them sound; but the smith remarks that it is well to be slow and sure, and proceeds to weld a doubtful link. In the sequel the smith dies, is turned away from hell, and goes to heaven, where he finds the door ajar, and throws his hammer into the crack; if he did not get in, the narrator knows not what became of him.³

The smith debarred from heaven and hell, and hence obliged to wander eternally, is known also in numerous German versions. In the Upper Palatinate it is related that a smith gives work to an applicant, apparently a poor journeyman, but who proves so skilful that he is able to detach the foot of a horse, adjust the shoe, and restore the leg to its original condition.⁴ When the time comes for parting, the former servant grants his master three wishes. The smith has been annoyed by thieves who steal the nails from his bag, defile his stone, and rob his apple-tree; he therefore desires that whoso inserts a hand in the bag may be unable to remove it, that a man who sits on the stone may stick there, and that any one who climbs his apple-tree cannot get down. After the departure of his servant, the smith falls into poverty, and makes a compact with the

¹ *Cymru fu*, Wrexham, 1862, p. 385, from oral tradition. Abstracted by Wirt Sikes, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

² Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Nos. 81, 82, and Notes; R. Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften*, Weimar, 1898, i. 67 *et al.*, see index; A. Voigt, *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte*, v. (1892), 62.

³ S. W. Dasent, *Popular Tales from the Norse*, Edinburgh, 1859, No. 16.

⁴ The tale has been "contaminated" by the story of the Master-smith (the legend of St. Eloi). See Köhler, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

Devil (in the form of a green man), in virtue of which he is to be enriched, on condition of an enigmatical cession ; the object to be yielded proves to be his unborn son. After seven years, the Devil sends subordinate demons to obtain the prize, and take the smith, who has offered his own life to redeem that of the child. The three fiends are successively shut in the bag, fastened to the stone, and attached to the tree, and in each case well hammered by the smith and his men. The principal devil then comes in person, and carries off the smith ; but on the way to hell he meets a priest carrying the sacrament to a sick person, and in order to hide himself from the terrifying presence of the halidome, creeps into the bag, where he is detained, and obliged to promise the captive immunity. When the smith comes to die, he is rejected at the gates of heaven and hell ; he does indeed obtain temporary admission into the former place, but by a stratagem is cast out. He is obliged to roam between the homes of rest and torment ; some persons call him the Wandering Jew (*Der ewige Jude*).¹

The three comical wishes of the tale seem originally to have been that thieves might be imprisoned respectively in the sack, the chair, and the fruit-tree. Instead of the chair, a variety substituted a pack of winning cards ; thus, in a Roman story, a host who has liberally entertained Jesus and his disciples is promised whatever gift he may desire ; however, as the beneficiary is a person of a contented mind, who has no family and a thriving trade, he is at a loss to know what he should ask. At last it occurs to him that he is fond of cards, and he desires that he may be able always to win. Two wishes remain, and St. Peter performs his duty by making his usual suggestion, namely, that the proper course is to request the salvation of the asker's soul ; but unheeding this intimation, the host desires that, inasmuch as his figs are always stolen, whoever climbs the tree may be obliged to remain until liberated, and that he may have a life of four hundred years. Finally, at the advice of the saint, he does run after the Lord, and request his soul's salvation, which is granted as a fourth boon. After the term has expired, Death arrives, but is caught in the tree, and forced to cede another four hundred years. When these are expired, Death takes the man, and according to the final promise of the Saviour is about to convey him to Paradise, but on the way (according to a common mediæval conception) is obliged to pass the gate of Hell, where the Devil is standing. The inn-keeper proposes a game of cards, the stake being his own soul, against that of the damned who had just been admitted ; by virtue of the winning pack, he gains all the souls, with which he repairs to the gate of heaven. "Who's there ?" asks St. Peter. "He of

¹ Schönwerth, *op. cit.*, iii. 77.

the four hundred years." "And what 's all that rabble behind you?" "Souls that I have won for Paradise." "Oh, that won't do at all, here," replies St. Peter. In the end, the saint consents to refer the matter to Christ, who orders that the innkeeper only is to be admitted; but when the latter sends word that when the Lord had applied for lodging at his inn, he himself had never made difficulty by reason of disciples following, orders are given for the reception of the whole party.¹ Another version names the host as the priest Olivo.²

The same history is related, with witty touches, in a poem of the eighteenth century, by D. Batacchi: The priest Ulivo entertains Jesus and his followers with remarkable liberality, the cuisine being described *con amore*. For guerdon the priest is allowed a wish, and desires to live six hundred years. St. Peter reproves him for lack of good sense, and advises him to try again (thus intimating that the only proper desire of man should be for eternal felicity). Ulivo does not follow this suggestion; as he has a tree from which he never gets pears, he asks that any thief may be detained until he grants leave to come down; since he is fond of playing cards after the hour at which his companions are impatient for bed, he begs that any one who sits on a certain chair may not rise till he pleases, and also that his cards may win. The host, therefore, has spent his three wishes without obtaining salvation, which nevertheless the saint promises. Ulivo, by means of the chair and the pear-tree, is twice enabled to arrest Death, with whom he makes contracts which insure him a life extended nearly down to the present time. The ending answers to the modern Roman legend.³

The version of Batacchi explains in what manner the hero may have acquired the repute which, in a tale of Grimm, has given him the name of Jack the Gambler.⁴ Some narrator suggested that an inveterate gamester might use the magic chair for insuring a supply of adversaries who were not permitted to leave the card-table; the next step was to borrow from other histories the trait that a holy personage might always be able to win in the game.⁵ Thus, in a celebrated *fabliau*, we learn that a minstrel who has shared the usual fate of his profession, and gone naked and hungry till Death releases him, is captured by an inexperienced demon and taken to hell, which he finds the only warm and comfortable place he has known. Fondness

¹ R. H. Busk, *Roman Legends*, Boston, 1877, p. 178.

² Busk, p. 183.

³ *Novelle*, Milan, 1879, p. 5.

⁴ Grimm, No. 82, *Spielhansl*.

⁵ In case of necessity, a saint could throw sevens (by the breaking of a die). *Hist. litt. de la France*, xxiii. 112.

for heat makes him a suitable person to stoke the fire for heating the kettle in which are boiling souls of the damned. Satan and his troop go out hunting, leaving the singer at his duty. St. Peter perceives the opportunity, descends from heaven, and has no difficulty in awakening the former passion for dice; the singer sets as his stake the souls, with the result that he loses them, as Peter always throws one higher. The returning fiend, who finds hell empty, in his rage expels the singer, and beats the devil who had been careless enough to fetch in such booty; from that time there has been no hell for poets. We do not learn what became of the minstrel; but the *fabliau* must have had for basis a popular narration which must have offered some explanation, and may have been akin to the legend with which I am concerned.¹

Another sub-species of the history is distinguished by the traits that the wishes are granted in exchange for alms rather than for hospitality, and that the bag takes the character of a wishing-sack, in which the owner is able to carry off whatever he pleases. From a mere variant this type has developed into a narration widely different, to the extent of being quite unrecognizable except through comparative examination.

Only slightly deviating from the mother-form is an Irish story. A travelling smith, Seághan Tinceár (Jack the Tinker), takes service in Kildare; on the way, in passing a bridge, he has stumbled, and wishes that the Devil may break his neck, if ever again he take that road. Returning after four years with the earnings of his labor, he meets an aged beggar who asks alms in the name of God; this happens three times, and Jack gives away all his money. On each occasion he obtains a wish, and desires, first, to confine anything disagreeable in the bottle he carries, secondly to detain any offender in his bag, and thirdly to keep thieves in his apple-tree. Forgetful of his vow, Jack does once more cross the bridge, and is accosted by the Devil, whom he wishes into his bag, and afterward causes the fiend to be beaten at a smithy. The Devil returns, but is induced to mount the tree, where he remains seven years, till Jack picks him off in gathering a fagot for his wife; the third time the persecutor is shut in the bottle.² The story lacks the proper ending, having instead annexed another legendary tale of kindred character.³

Wider is the deviation in a Gascon narrative. A peddler, who is neither a good nor a bad man, carries his wares in the bag on his back. He is solicited for charity, first by a lame old man, then by a female beggar, and gives away what little he possesses. These

¹ Montaignon and Raynaud, *Recueil général*, Paris, 1883, v. 65.

² D. Hyde, *An Sgéahuide Gaedhealach*, London, No. 3.

³ That of "Godfather Death," Grimm, No. 44; Köhler, i. 291.

mendicants, however, are only transformations of St. Peter, on whom the alms have been bestowed, and who, in guerdon, asks the liberal benefactor to name his wish, at the same time commanding him to discard his present possessions. The peddler accordingly throws away his sack; but having his chief happiness and content in his trade, he can think of nothing better to ask for than a new bag. This the saint bestows, with the addition that the recipient is at liberty to wish into the sack anything he desires to obtain. The peddler now has a merry life, seeing that he is able to appropriate without compensation any delicacy that suits his palate; the temptation proves too strong for his principles, and he obtains in this manner the wife he seeks. When he comes to die and makes application at the gate of heaven, this liberty becomes ground for rejection. However, the peddler is not to be daunted; he lingers at the entrance until he has opportunity to fling in the bag, and then wishes himself inside; once in heaven, he insists on remaining.¹

The gayety and reckless humor belonging to this form of the story gave it an attraction which procured circulation through all Europe.² A Spanish version relates the discomfiture of Death by the aid of the fruit-tree and wishing-bag, but adds the feature that Juan the Soldier wishes St. Peter himself into the sack, and so secures heaven by force.³ An episode uses the bag in such manner as to effect the disenchantment of a castle; a Russian variant, enlarging this episode, becomes a mere recital of fantastic adventures, in which the legend resolves itself into a fairy-tale.⁴

That the history enjoyed mediæval popularity is shown by numerous literary reworkings of the sixteenth and following centuries.

In 1526 the Venetian Cintio dei Fabrizii, having occasion to explain the origin of popular proverbs, used the tale to illustrate the adage, "Envy never dies." In order to satisfy himself as to the degree of justice in the murmurings of mankind, in company with Mercury, Jupiter descended to earth, and obtained lodging from Envy (*Invidia*). In recompense for kindness, the god, on departure, asks her to name a wish. She requests protection for her apple-tree, which is frequently visited by thieves, and Jupiter gives it the property that none who climbs may descend without the owner's permission. When Death comes for Envy, she asks him, as a last favor, to pluck an apple from her tree. Death is thus fixed in the boughs,

¹ Cénac Moncaut, *Littérature populaire de la Gascogne*, Paris, 1868, p. 57.

² See R. Köhler, *op. cit.*, i. pp. 83, 111; also A. Leskien and K. Brugmann, *Litauische Volkslieder und Märchen*, Strassburg, 1882, No. 17, note (in which are mentioned Russian, Polish, Czech, and Moravian versions).

³ F. Wolf, *Beiträge zur spanischer Volkspoesie aus den Werken F. Caballeros*, Vienna, 1859, p. 74.

⁴ Afanasief, *Skazki*, v. 43.

where he is detained until Jupiter, desiring his release, promises Envy immortality.¹

In 1551 Hans Sachs gave the history a rhymed form. In return for shelter, St. Peter grants a peasant three wishes; these are, that he may know Death when he sees him, and that whoever blows his fire must continue until told to stop. Death is thus caught, and compelled to grant a respite. Finally, when Death is again imprisoned, and no man dies, St. Peter descends to earth, and offers the farmer a hundred years of life if he will set the destroyer free.²

Before 1582 an anonym wrote the history of one Sanctus, in which he freely used the legend, which he combined with other similar material. Sanctus, pursued by Death, makes a truce by accepting him as godfather of his son,³ and obtains an extension of his earthly term. He resolves to lead a good life, but is tempted by the Devil, and yields (as Jack in the American version) on the ground that there is plenty of time left for repentance. When the period expires, he flies, and arrives in heaven, where he misconducts himself and is expelled, but promised that three wishes may be accomplished. Death, who has used up seven hundred pairs of shoes in seeking him, wishes to carry him off, but the expedient of the tree is used, and no man dies, whence results great distress. Sanctus at last himself grows weary of life, and seeks Death, whom he invites to descend. As the remaining two wishes he desires salvation and remembrance on earth.⁴

The version of Attanasy von Dilling, printed in 1691, more closely resembles the modern forms. Christ and St. Peter lodge with a smith, and are kindly treated by the good wife of the host. On leaving, the woman is offered a wish, and desires only heaven. The husband, who is promised four wishes, in spite of repeated suggestions on the part of St. Peter that he ought to desire his soul's salvation, selects the usual detention in the cherry-tree at the forge and bellows, and finally, that his green cap shall remain his own property, and he may not be parted from it. After Death has twice failed, the Devil comes, and is kept at the bellows until he vows never to have anything to do with the smith. Finally, the smith's guardian angel is sent to take him, and carries him to hell, where the Devil, on perceiving the new-comer, hastily shuts the window from which he is looking. The smith is next escorted to heaven,

¹ *Fahrbuch für Romanische und Englische Litteratur*, i. (1859) 310.

² C. Lützelberger, *Album des literarischen Vereins in Nürnberg*, 1864, 232, "Der Tod auf dem Stule." I have not found the piece in the collected works of Sachs.

³ With reference to the tale of "Godfather Death," above noted.

⁴ J. Bolte, "Die Historia von Sancto," *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, xxxii. (1892) 369.

where St. Peter is equally unwilling to accept the visitor; but in virtue of the fourth wish, the dead smith is still provided with his cap, which he throws in, and remains seated on his property.¹

More popular than any other literary form has been that in which the legend has been put to an allegorical use, in a different sense from that of the Venetian author; instead of Envy, it is Misery that never dies. Such is the conclusion of a French chap-book, "*L'Histoire du bonhomme Misère*," which from the beginning of the eighteenth century has had an enormous circulation in successive editions. Peter and Paul, who rove the earth as needy vagrants, in the first instance apply at the door of Wealthy (*Richard*), by whom they are refused; they proceed, and are taken in by Misery, who entertains as well as he may his visitors, to whom he abandons his couch of straw! On departing, the guests ask Misery to desire what he pleases. The poor man, who is out of spirits because his pear-tree has been robbed, can think of nothing better than any one who climbs it shall be unable to come down without permission. In this manner he catches a thief whom he pardons. When Death arrives, he succeeds in enticing him into the tree, and refuses release until Death promises never again to come after him, and moralizes: "You can boast, good man, to be the first living man who ever vanquished Death. Heaven ordains that with thy consent I quit thee, and return not until the day of the universal judgment, after I shall have achieved my great work, the destruction of the human race. See it thou shalt, I warrant thee; without hesitancy, suffer me to descend, or fly hence; at the distance of a hundred leagues, a widow awaits me in order to depart." From that day Misery has dwelt in the same poverty, near his beloved tree, where, according to the pledge of Death, he shall remain as long as world is world.²

The name of Misery as chief actor appears also in a number of traditional versions, which, however, seem to me to have borrowed the appellation (though not the plot) from the chap-book.³

¹ Vulpius, *Curiositäten*, Weimar, 1813, iii. 422. See Grimm, Note to No. 82, who gives an account also of the version of Trömer, "*Der Schmied von Jüterbogk*."

² J. F. H. Champfleury, *Recherches sur l'origine et les variations du Bonhomme Misère*, Paris, 1861; reprinted in *Histoire du l'imagerie populaire*, Paris, 1869, pp. 105-88.

³ Italian, "*Compar Miseria*," A. de Gubernatis, *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*, Turin, 1869, No. 32; T. F. Crane, *Italian Popular Tales*, Boston, 1885, p. 221. Misery, having entertained Jesus and St. Peter, is granted three wishes, which are magic chair, the fig-tree, salvation. In the end, Death abandons the attempt to capture Misery, who never dies. The inconsistency of the desire for salvation with the trait of deathlessness, shows sufficiently the hybridization of the tale. The author of the story in the chap-book says it came from Italy; this may have been only a *façon de parler*. The writer used a legend in which Christ was

The undying Misery has an analogy to the Wandering Jew, which has not been overlooked by ballad-makers. A Breton *gwerz* (ballad) makes *Misère* meet Isaac the Wanderer, with whom he has a discussion in alternate rhymes. Isaac, who can boast only seventeen hundred years, is a child compared to Misery, who was born when Adam went into exile. The former is furious against the latter as the author of his distresses; but the song has a moral turn; Misery remarks that those who desire to avoid him have only to shun prodigality and be industrious.¹

The name is used as the basis of an allegory by an author whose rather stupid work is given in the "Bibliothèque Bleue." Obstinate, in company with Passion, Patience, and Reason, is seeking the way to the house of Happiness. Misery appears a little and decrepit man, with a chain on his leg, carrying a burden; influenced by Hope, he is on his way to the land of Happiness, where he expects soon to arrive. Obstinate is anxious to follow, until he is shown by what impossible paths the journey is made.²

It will be observed that in the older versions of the legend it is Death, not the Devil, who is the enemy to be overcome; internal evidence favors the view that this was the original form of the story, that the hero of the action did become exempt from death, but that the resultant evils compelled providential interference. The version of von Dilling shows in what manner, as a substitute for Death, the Devil may have been introduced into the narration.

The Maryland variant presents numerous variations from the recorded English and Irish tales, yet as a rule such differences find parallels in European forms of the story, and are therefore likely to have been imported; of anything distinctively negro there is nothing, except the dialect, and the singular name given to the wife provided for the fiend.³

The legend presents a striking example of the variation incident to traditional narratives, which, after the manner of a living organism, alter in such wise as to fill every vacuum. The adversary is either Death, or the Devil, or both; the hero either becomes deathless, or obtains a long life; when he does finally pass away, his

made to apply first at the house of a rich man (*Richard*), afterwards at that of a poor one; this trait does not appear in "Compar Miseria," nor in the Bohemian tale given by Waldau, *Slavische Blätter*, 1865, 598, "Gevatter Elend." See, also, the Breton tale below cited, and Köhler, *op. cit.*, i. 103, 349.

¹ Champfleury, p. 164, after the communication of F. M. Luzel.

² Champfleury, p. 175.

³ The Devil is detained in the fruit-tree by the power belonging to the sign of the cross; so in a Breton variant, he is imprisoned in the box by holy nails, and in the tree by bars of iron which have been sprinkled with holy water. P. Sébillot, *Littérature orale de la Haute-Bretagne*, Paris, 1881, p. 175, "Misère."

spirit either reaches heaven, or remains in an intermediate state ; in the latter case he either wanders as a ghost, or changes into an *ignis fatuus*.

The diffusion of folk-tales is also illustrated. Out of a single narration variants are seen to arise, establish themselves as sub-species, circulate without obstruction by barriers of race or language, in fresh soil strike independent root, and in each region assume appropriate personal reference and local color.

It is not necessary to suppose that in all instances such evolution requires a very long period of time. As already remarked, there is reason to assume that the forms of the story in which the Devil figures are modern rather than mediæval ; yet their recency has not prevented the attainment of European circulation, and in such manner that any one district is likely to present several such variants. The special narration which makes the overcomer of Satan turn into a wandering fire may be of English origin, yet has been accepted in Wales and Ireland.

Though the legend, in all its varieties, considered as a particular tale, is hardly ancient, yet it belongs to a genus which can be traced into antiquity ; such genealogical inquiry must be reserved for a future occasion.¹

William Wells Newell.

¹ Since these pages were in type, I have learned from a friend (Dr. W. A. Farabee of Harvard University) that belief in the *ignis fatuus*, as a supernatural phenomenon, is still widely spread among whites through the United States. In Pennsylvania hunters observed that they were followed by a light, which paused when they concealed themselves, and retreated when pursued ; this they took to be a Jack-a-lantern (see *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, ii. (1889), 35). In Dallas County, Missouri, where many persons were occupied with dreams of buried treasure (coin having actually been concealed during the civil war), a light said to have been observed for years on marshy though elevated ground, was taken to be a Jack-a-lantern, which served as the token of such hidden wealth ; when investigation proved unavailing, the sign was presumed to have another meaning.

As to the more ancient form of the legend under discussion, in which Death is the adversary to be encountered, D. Hyde (see p. 55, note 2) observes that there are Irish variants, in which Seághan Tinnceár overcomes Death instead of the Devil. No doubt English versions of corresponding form formerly existed.

For negro superstitions concerning the *ignis fatuus*, see this *Journal*, i. (1888), 139.